

The Great War and Two Revolutions, 1914-1924

IN RETROSPECT, Karl Kautsky lost the basis for his historical importance on 4 August 1914. The capitulation of most major socialist parties to the nationalistic passions of the war, the apparent collapse of the internationalist commitments of socialists, and, in 1917, the split of the SPD, all were developments that contradicted Kautsky's preconceptions and convictions. With the Bolshevik seizure of power in late 1917, the focal point of world socialism began to shift from western Europe to Russia and the nonwestern world. By mid-1919, Kautsky was a man whom time had passed by. In 1924 he returned to Vienna to live out the last years of his life as an isolated and all but forgotten former doyen of Marxian socialism. The war and the rise of the Bolsheviks changed the main thrust of Marxism in such a way that Kautsky became a peripheral figure, at first viciously attacked and subjected to ridicule and scorn, but finally merely rejected.

Kautsky's fall from prominence symbolized the resolution, at least for a time, of the ambiguities of Marxism as the theory of revolutionary movements. Kautsky represented the more deterministic, less violent, more humanistic implications of Marx's writings. Lenin represented the more voluntaristic, more violent, less humanistic implications of those same writings. The savage brutality of war and the hostility of both internal and external opponents drove first Russian and then a large proportion of international Marxism further and further from Kautsky's milder interpretations. But it was historical circumstance that determined the shift, not the inherent qualities of Marxism, whether of Lenin's or of Kautsky's brand. Despite the claims of the ideologues, Kautsky's interpretation of Marxism was not incorrect, it was just on the losing side. Unfortunately for his historical and per-

sonal reputation, historians, like sports fans, are attracted by, and compelled to deal with, winners.

Opposition to the War and the Party

Once formal declarations of war had been made, Kautsky's major concern was to preserve as much theoretical integrity as possible in the face of the overwhelming national enthusiasm for war. This enthusiasm was widespread, affecting not only the great majority of the SPD *Fraktion*, but also the mass of the working-class population. Kautsky had long felt that if the socialists could not significantly influence the politics that led to war, they certainly could not hope to stop it once it had broken out. For this reason he contended that once conflict erupted, the major practical question was not war or peace, but victory or defeat. However, as will be shown below, he was very suspicious of the motives of the German government. He placed very narrow limits on the extent to which socialists could cooperate with the ruling classes in the pursuit of victory. After the war credits vote of 4 August, his major efforts were directed at keeping the party from splitting over the war issue, and providing theoretical clarity in the muddle of the first weeks of war.

Kautsky contended that though the socialist workers' movement was internationalist, each separate movement had a perfectly legitimate and necessary interest in defending national integrity. He made a distinction between the national state (*Nationalstaat*) and the nationalistic state (*Nationalitätenstaat*), the former being characterized by shared language and interests, the latter being primarily an aggressive, negative concept based on recognition of common enemies. The workers, said Kautsky, had always and would always recognize the validity of national states, but their internationalism made them reject nationalistic states, which were associated with the economic and political predominance of the bourgeoisie. This argument was an expansion of a position Kautsky had put forth in a much different context in 1907. During the first two-and-a-half years of the war, Kautsky used this position primarily against the right-wing members of the SPD who completely capitulated to war fever. But as the war dragged on, the leftist opposition within the German party became more vociferous in its insistence that national defense contradicted Marx's contention that the workers had no country. Kautsky pointed out to the left that even in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx explicitly recognized that the workers did have national interests, but that they were qualitatively different

from those of the bourgeoisie in that workers' nationalism was not defined in opposition to the interests of other nations.¹

For most of the war Kautsky felt that preserving the unity of the party was of the utmost importance. His notion of how the socialists would fare during and after the war was predicated on the assumption that the party would remain united and pursue the tactic of moral opposition. Furthermore, like most other political observers at the time, in August and September 1914, Kautsky assumed that the war would be a short one, perhaps only three months, but certainly not more than six months to a year long. He was convinced that the massive demands made by modern warfare on human and natural resources, industrial and financial systems, and military machines could not be sustained for very long. Thus, though he was acutely aware of the divisive impact of the war on the SPD, as long as he assumed the war would be short, he restrained his own criticism for the sake of preserving the unity that would be vital after the war ended.

As the war continued, Kautsky came increasingly to realize that the requirement of party unity was difficult to reconcile with the friction created by the enthusiastic support given the war effort by the party's right wing. Even in late November 1914, when the war was approaching its fourth month, he began to suggest that the duration of the war would make it extremely difficult for critics of the party's official policy to remain silent. At this time he was still inclined, in private, to see the Luxemburg-Liebkecht left as the major threat to party unity. He was clearly uncomfortable about being lumped together with the extreme left by right-wing critics and felt that Luxemburg's major aim was to create her own party since she could not dominate the SPD. As he wrote to Adler on 28 November: "If she [Luxemburg] cannot direct the large party, she wants to have a small one." But even at this early date Kautsky felt that the extremism of the right wing—David, Südekum, Heine, and the trade unionists especially—was a major factor in Luxemburg's appeal. By its enthusiastic support for the government the party had opposed for so long, the right wing encouraged the workers to turn to the left, so that they were drawing closer to Luxemburg's position with each day of the war. By February 1915, Kautsky's position had clearly shifted; he now felt that the greatest threat to party unity came not from the *Rosauiern*, the followers of Rosa Luxemburg, but from the right. At that time he only very reluctantly, out of a continuing commitment to unity and because of the pressures of wartime censorship, refrained from an outright condemnation of the party leadership, especially the *Fraktion*. From early 1915

until mid-1917, he concentrated almost exclusively on countering the party's right wing. His centrist position was most clearly revealed in his defense of the Second International against attacks from both the right and the left.²

Kautsky's distinction between the national state and the nationalistic state allowed him to contend that the workers of the major European nations had the right to national self-defense while also arguing that the war did not spell the end of the Second International. In addition, because he had never deluded himself, as had some proponents of the International, that this world organization of socialist parties had any but moral force at its command, Kautsky did not see socialist support for defensive war as a betrayal of internationalism and the destruction of the International. On this more than any other issue, the typical criticism of Kautsky as unrealistic is nonsense. He knew very well that socialists alone could not stop war, that massive popular protests would not occur once war had started, that the best the socialists of the world could hope for was to maintain moral superiority by not supporting aggressive, acquisitive war. Thus, unlike the right-wing socialists who abandoned internationalism in the same proportion as they accepted chauvinism, and unlike the left socialists who denounced the Second International to the extent that their unrealistic hopes were dashed by socialist support for the war, Kautsky doggedly insisted that the International had not been destroyed by the war. Rather he contended that the true nature and limits of the effectiveness of the International had been revealed by the response to the war.³

Through early 1915, then, Kautsky's position on the war and the SPD's response to it may be summarized as follows: Though clearly not enthusiastic about it, Kautsky argued that socialists had to support the war to the extent that it was a war of national self-defense, because the very real interests of the workers were at stake; though suspicious of the government's justifications for the war and of the enthusiasm of many socialists for the war, he moderated his criticisms out of considerations of party unity; and finally, assuming that the war would not last long, and that therefore party tensions would not reach intolerable levels, he looked forward to the impending peace and the advantages the socialists would reap from the war brought on by bourgeois imperialism.

These positions were all consistent with ones Kautsky had espoused long before the war, and each makes some sense in and of itself, but more than ever before, the shortcomings of his reliance on rational analysis were to be revealed by the more than four years of war. While he dealt with the war and the issues it raised in a calculating, sensible

fashion, the revolutionary frustration and disgust of the left and the chauvinism of the right both increased quite independently of objective factors. But equally important to Kautsky's position during the first months of the war was his assumption that the conflict would not last long. Had the war been a short one, his restraint for the sake of unity might well have been justified by later events. But because the war dragged on for over four years, the internal conflicts of the party were exacerbated to the point of a split. Against the backdrop of this development, Kautsky's early caution could not win much support. Victor Adler was a more astute judge of human nature than was his close friend. In late March 1915, Adler wrote to Kautsky: "You think all men are like you, that [they] make decisions on reason. Quite the contrary. They act as they must and are able, and then they look for the theoretical foundation."⁴ The enthusiasms of the extremes increasingly meant Kautsky's isolation.

Although entirely willing to hold off on intraparty criticism during the first few months of the war, Kautsky rejected the concept of *Burgfrieden* from the very beginning. He could not accept its implicit assumption that the German government was faultless with regard to the origins of the war, nor did he feel that his own concept of the validity of national self-defense demanded unquestioning support for the political and military actions of the German government and armed forces. He made a distinction between the "decision" of 4 August, that is, the war credits vote, which he felt was justified by the demands of national self-defense, and the "policy" of 4 August, that is, the *Burgfrieden* and the growing chauvinistic, imperialistic pronouncements of the socialists who supported the war. He rejected the "policy" of 4 August because it went beyond the reasonable requirements of national self-defense, demanding that socialists support imperialism, territorial aggrandizement, and the most extreme forms of national hatreds. He therefore regularly and fervently argued against the *Umlerner*, those who held that the party had to change its theories to correspond to the supposed new realities represented by the war.⁵

Rightists in the party were the major targets of Kautsky's polemics throughout the war years. Although he also objected to the leftist position of defeatism or turning the war into revolution, he was compelled by circumstance to concentrate his attack on the supporters of the war. There were three major reasons for this. First, in number and prestige those within the SPD who supported the war far outstripped those who opposed it, although the latter group did increase slowly and steadily. Second, wartime censorship had a dual effect on Kautsky's polemics. On the one hand, because the right-wing socialists argued in

favor of the war, the censors allowed much more of their material to be printed than was so for the critics of the war. The same principle applied to Kautsky's responses, that is, in his criticism he could more easily discuss the concepts presented by the rightists than he could those presented by the leftists. On the other hand, the very fact that censorship existed at all meant that the German press could not discuss a large variety of topics, and thus, just as in the earlier antisocialist law period, the closest thing to freedom of expression was the immunity afforded Reichstag members. Since the rightists dominated the *Fraktion*, their voices were most frequently heard, a fact which probably tended to make the capitulation of German socialists to chauvinism seem even more widespread than it was, at least to foreigners and those who had only the press to rely on for information. Third, because of his conviction that the International had to play an important role in the peace that followed the war, Kautsky was determined to combat the tendency on the right to attack enemy socialists with ever increasing violence. He was critical of German socialists who denounced the French or the English as inveterate evils, but he also rejected the efforts of French or English writers to blame the war solely on the Germans.⁶

Differences of opinion about the war created within German socialism extensive realignments of left-right affiliations that at least for the war years often had little to do with prewar sympathies. The two most outstanding examples, as far as Kautsky was concerned, involved Eduard Bernstein and Heinrich Cunow. Following their split in 1899, Bernstein and Kautsky had not been in close or frequent contact, and though articles by Bernstein appeared occasionally in the pages of the *Neue Zeit*, the two men remained on very distant terms. During the first days of the war, it seemed unlikely that this situation would change. Bernstein was one of the right-wing *Fraktion* members who had decided on 2 August to vote for war credits regardless of the decision made by the *Fraktion* as a whole. But within weeks of the outbreak of the war, Bernstein moved toward Kautsky's position, and close personal contacts between the two men resumed. Bernstein became one of the major contributors to the *Neue Zeit*, and he and Kautsky worked together closely in an effort to combat the rising chauvinism of the party majority. They issued joint statements, argued in favor of one another's positions, and, with Hugo Haase and Georg Ledebour, formed the core of the old-timers who left the party in April 1917 to found the Independent German Social Democratic Party (Unabhängige sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands—USPD). After over fifteen years of separation, the reestablishment of the Kautsky-Bernstein relationship was greatly satisfying to both men.⁷

In stark contrast to the revival of his friendship with Bernstein was the change in Kautsky's relationship with Heinrich Cunow. Long a close co-worker with Kautsky on the *Neue Zeit*, an editor of the *Vorwärts* since 1905, and generally considered a member of Kautsky's Marxist center, Cunow followed a course opposite to that of Bernstein. When the first vote to support war credits was cast by the SPD *Fraktion*, he denounced it. But in a matter of weeks, he became not only a partisan of the German war effort, but also one of the leading figures of the *Umlerner*. As had happened so often in the past, Kautsky found himself opposed by an old friend and, furthermore, subjected to vitriolic personal attacks. Although some of the *Umlerner* struck Kautsky as simply ludicrous, largely because they had never understood Marxism very well to begin with, he thought Cunow's position more formidable in theoretical terms. Nonetheless, he insisted that Marxism was neither a hastily conceived nor a narrowly limited theory and held that though some minor rethinking might be necessary as a result of the war, nothing like the wholesale changes Cunow thought necessary was justified. He was particularly harsh in his attack on Cunow's efforts to redefine the role of the state to make it an agent of socialization on a large scale. Kautsky further pointed out that the harsh condemnation being leveled by Cunow against the "old" orthodoxy could equally be applied to Cunow's earlier work. As usual he refrained from bitter personal polemics, but he clearly felt keenly the loss of yet another former comrade. When in August 1917 the party leadership stripped Kautsky of the *Neue Zeit* editorship, it was given to Cunow.⁸

The apparent endlessness of the war not only affected Kautsky's evaluation of proper tactics, it also placed him in an increasingly difficult position vis-à-vis the split that developed as a result of the war. Never was the label "centrism" more appropriate for Kautsky's position than during the war years. While convinced of the need to preserve party unity and opposed to the defeatism and the anti-Second International posture of the extreme left wing of the German party, the ever more extreme capitulation of the right wing to imperialism, chauvinism, and acquisitive war aims forced Kautsky to define his own position almost exclusively in terms of opposition to the party majority. Furthermore, as the war proceeded he became much more aware that the deck was stacked in favor of the majority and that in conjunction with governmental censorship, the restrictions on the propaganda of the minority (or "opposition" as it was called) were very stringent. Like many of those further to the left, Kautsky came to realize that the highly centralized, well-disciplined, and united party he himself had

helped to create could very effectively suppress dissent simply by calling upon party discipline, the need to preserve unity, and party tradition. Under the conditions that prevailed during the war, when party congresses were considered impossible, leadership shifted almost exclusively to the *Fraktion*, where the tradition of unanimity effectively stifled public dissent. Not until the early spring of 1916 did collective opposition, as opposed to individual deviation, appear within the *Fraktion*, when Hugo Haase led the opposition representatives in the formation of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* ("working group").⁹

This first manifestation of organized parliamentary opposition placed Kautsky in a difficult position. His sympathies were definitely with the oppositional group. Even before the war he had long objected to the influence that seemed to flow to the Reichstag *Fraktion* regardless of considerations of theory or ability. Kautsky also had objected in the past to the fact that the SPD representatives tended to be more responsive to their electoral constituents than to the party, and in wartime this meant, to Kautsky at least, that these men deviated even more than ever from orthodoxy. But convinced that unity was vital, Kautsky had decidedly mixed feelings about the succession of the Reichstag oppositional group. Nonetheless, he had laid the basis for a personal split with the party majority in a series of *Neue Zeit* articles that ran from late October through early December 1915. In the introduction to the pamphlet version of this series, he explained that he had been driven to the conclusions expressed in this work by the suppression of dissent by the party majority. Not only was the minority virtually excluded from the party press, but it was silenced even in the Reichstag, where it might have hoped to be heard. Formerly, on issues of major importance, when presenting the party's positions to the Reichstag, the *Fraktion* had chosen a second speaker from the minority. But since the war had revealed the deep split within the party, the majority now denied even this traditional platform to the minority. Kautsky therefore justified what amounted to a theoretical foundation for a party split by reference to the majority's unwillingness to tolerate dissent.¹⁰

Kautsky began his arguments by referring to the constant and inevitable conflict between personal conviction, that which moves people to take stands on issues, and the means by which this conviction can be converted into effective action, namely, cooperation with large numbers of like-minded individuals. Now because no two individuals are exactly alike, he argued, cooperation for action always involves a measure of compromise with personal conviction. Fortunately, in a mass, working-class party the individual members come from generally similar environments and therefore have less individual variation, a

stronger sense of common purpose, and less need for repressive discipline. However, such a party, while seeking a maximum of inclusiveness, that is, in trying to increase its size, does so at the expense of spontaneous enthusiasm, that is, by bringing about the need for greater individual submission to the collective will.¹¹

According to Kautsky, reconciliation of the conflict between size and enthusiasm in order to attain an optimum level of both values could only be achieved by the "fullest freedom of expression of opinion within the party organizations." Not only were differences of opinion inevitable, they were also essential if the party was to avoid ossification. He argued further that party members had not only the right to dissent, but also the duty to listen to the dissent of others. Here he arrived at the nub of his argument: Under the extraordinary conditions of war, the right to dissent was suppressed and the duty to listen was ignored. Though the SPD previously had always insisted on discipline once congressional and parliamentary decisions were reached, now the majority used its superior position to prevent even a modicum of discussion; in so doing the majority violated party custom. Kautsky further challenged the right of the majority to act against the minority for violating party discipline since the majority itself had already declared that the extraordinary conditions of war justified contradiction of party decisions against budget support. He concluded this portion of his arguments with an enticement, a warning, and a challenge. The enticement was that the public forum, if the minority were allowed access to it, might have a moderating influence on the views of the opposition. The warning was that suppression bred extremism. The implied challenge was to the majority to test its ideas against those of the minority out in the open.¹²

At first blush these arguments, coming from the man so often called the "party pope" and condemned for dogmatism, might seem absurd and opportunistic. But certain things are worth recalling at this point. First of all, Kautsky's arguments rested on the assumption that freedoms and access formerly accorded to minority opinion within the SPD had been eliminated by the war. In a rebuttal to Kautsky, Otto Braun argued that in the *Neue Zeit* alone the previous twenty-one numbers had carried forty-six articles by oppositionists and only fourteen by supporters of the majority, but this contention was obviously feeble given the restrictions of censorship. Second, Kautsky's journal had always, from its very first issue, carried articles by authors whose opinions differed from his own, and this tradition extended into the war years. Certainly Kautsky frequently took advantage of his position as editor to ensure that he had the upper hand in polemics, but he

always gave opponents space to say their piece. Third, strictly speaking, Kautsky was not arguing in favor of schism, but warning the majority not to force a split. And fourth, though the arguments he presented bear a striking resemblance to liberal-bourgeois arguments in favor of individualism, he consistently developed his position within the context of the party, defined as the collective of the working class. He explicitly recognized a need for discipline and even argued that it was the majoritarian Reichstag representatives who followed individual conviction by enthusiastically supporting the war. He was convinced that were the entire party free to express an opinion, the majority of its members would favor the position of the minority of the *Fraktion*.¹³

But even more important to evaluating the opinions Kautsky expressed in this pamphlet is the realization that for the first time since he entered the socialist movement over forty years earlier, he found himself fundamentally and apparently irreconcilably opposed to virtually all of the leadership of his party. Furthermore, because of the nature of the issues involved, he could no longer accept the premise, as he had on most occasions when he found himself at odds with this or that faction, that simply misinformation or mistaken judgment was involved. Now he was forced to face the fact that his position would not carry the party because his access to the public forum was severely limited and because the differences were probably too great to be reconciled anyway. Thus though undoubtedly he really did feel his position was more representative of the majority of the party, he was also quite aware that the extraordinary conditions imposed by war had trapped everyone. To this extent this pamphlet was in fact laying the theoretical groundwork for the party split everyone felt was coming. However, until late 1916 at least, Kautsky continued to hope that unity could be preserved, and even in April 1917, he only reluctantly participated in the split. To the bitter end he continued to hope that he could outwait the chauvinistic party leadership and, with the end of the war, aid in the restoration of reason to his party.¹⁴

Nationalism and Democracy

Increasing insistence on the need for freedom of expression within the context of the party was only one aspect of Kautsky's thought that underwent a major change of emphasis as a result of the war. Two other major issues, nationalism and democracy, were also significantly affected. A closer look at how his position was altered is justified for two reasons. First, in a different context, Kautsky had already written quite extensively on democracy and nationalism, but the war introduced

complications that forced him to clarify certain ambiguities. While there is little doubt that he had always assumed that socialism could only be attained by means of a majoritarian movement, the revisionism debate had found him arguing that in Germany at least, the proletarian movement took precedence over any imagined democratic movement postulated by Bernstein and his followers. Though the revisionist crisis had established this distinction clearly enough, the importance of the democracy issue during the war and its aftermath finally brought Kautsky to a more explicit presentation of his views. The same is generally true for nationalism, a matter on which Kautsky, like Marx, had always been ambiguous. The second reason for looking more closely at Kautsky's stance on democracy and nationalism during the war is the significance of these positions for his evaluation of Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution. Coupled with his attitude toward revolutionary violence, as developed during the mass-strike debates of 1902 to 1906, his views of democracy and nationalism formed the basis for his judgment of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. In addition to creating the conditions that made the Russian Revolution of 1917, the First World War and its impact on German socialism also gave shape to the premises from which Kautsky would criticize that revolution.

"Social democracy is an international and a democratic party. . . . But what is the struggle for democracy other than the struggle for the self-determination of people, and how is international democracy possible other than that self-determination be demanded not only for the people to which one belongs, but for all people in the same degree?"¹⁵ With these words Kautsky opened a pamphlet entitled *The Liberation of Nations*, which was written in mid-June 1917. He came to these conclusions not as a result of debates with left-socialist revolutionaries, not in order to defend petit bourgeois democracy and nationalism against the violent, determined, "new democracy" of the soviets, but because during almost four years of war, he saw his party and his adopted country develop war aims that disregarded the rights of other nations, that presumed that the might of the victor proved national superiority and justified conquest and domination. Through most of the war he was far less concerned with the increasing extremism of the left socialists than he was with the chauvinism and arrogance that came to characterize the right, and he refined his views of democracy and nationalism in response to the latter. Only after having developed his critique of the right did he use the same arguments against what he considered the equally perverted and dangerous arrogance of the left.

The two issues, democracy and nationalism, were inextricably linked in Kautsky's response to the increasing chauvinism of his party. As

early as August 1914, he insisted that any acceptable peace had to recognize "above all the independence of people, i.e., democracy." During the war he repeatedly emphasized that national independence "is an essential part of democracy, which is a necessary basis for the struggle of the proletariat." In a pamphlet written in early 1915, to combat both the leftists who rejected the concept of national boundaries and the rightists who argued that democracy was consistent with the expansion of Germany into non-German areas, Kautsky distinguished between national and nationalistic states. He then went on to observe that democracy "means not merely the domination of state power by the populace, but also the equality of rights of the individual vis-à-vis state power. This equality of rights is also prejudiced in nationalistic states." But he was careful to distinguish between democracy as an end and democracy as a means. This distinction was for Kautsky the major difference between bourgeois and social democracy.

Social democracy has taken over from bourgeois democracy the striving for the national state. Certainly we are not bourgeois democrats, but we differ from them not in that democracy is for us something insignificant or entirely superfluous. As the lowest class in the state, the proletariat can gain its rights in no other way than through democracy. Only we do not share the illusion of bourgeois democracy that the proletariat would already have its rights if it attained democracy. This forms the basis from which it struggles for its rights. The proletarian struggle for emancipation does not stop with democracy, it only assumes another form.¹⁶

Kautsky also found it necessary to combat the tendency of the right and the left to see imperialism as a necessary consequence of economic development and to equate imperialism with capitalism. The right concluded from this view that because socialists recognized that the development of capitalist society would inevitably lead to socialism, they had to support imperialism. Kautsky had, of course, taken on similar arguments before. The leftists argued that since imperialism *was* capitalism, the only alternative to imperialist war was the immediate establishment of socialism. Kautsky countered the first position by contending that imperialism was a political, not an economic, consequence of capitalism and, furthermore, that socialists have not always supported the advance of capitalism without qualification. He pointed out that some of these same rightists had earlier been the most vociferous in demanding higher wages for workers, when all would agree that low wages were to the advantage of capitalism. He also

argued vigorously that economics were only deterministic "in the last instance," that shifts in political power of the various classes "under certain circumstances can fundamentally alter the entire system of production." Therefore, he concluded, despite the economics of capitalism, socialists could oppose imperialism on political grounds. On the other hand, Kautsky argued that the leftists' demand that imperialism be ended immediately by the establishment of socialism sounded very radical, but only served to drive into the imperialist camp those who recognized the continuing obstacles to the immediate attainment of socialism.¹⁷

Of course Kautsky's arguments did not heal the wounds caused by the war. He continued to reiterate his assertion that democracy and nationalism were fundamental means in the fight for proletarian emancipation, always against the background of growing support among the socialist leadership for expansionist war aims. When German socialists began to accept *lebensraum* arguments and to urge the formation of a *Mitteleuropa* under German domination, Kautsky countered by arguing that "democracy does not merely mean freedom and self-determination for one class or one people, but for all. . . . One is no democrat if one demands freedoms for oneself and participates in the assault of others." He also tied national independence and proletarian internationalism together by claiming that just as high wages and short hours at home were threatened by low wages and long hours in neighboring countries, so domestic freedom was endangered if neighbors were oppressed. When more specific issues of expansion by Germany came up, such as the conquest of Poland or Belgium and the fate of Serbia, Kautsky addressed himself to these topics also. In all three of these cases he concluded that only national independence or autonomy made sense, given modern developments.¹⁸

National independence was not a simple, universally applicable principle for Kautsky. He recognized that given certain historical traditions of multinational political organization, specifically Russia and Austria, national autonomy within a federative framework provided the necessary guarantees of freedom from oppression. He also argued that the historical tendency toward national independence was only one aspect of the dialectical development of modern society. A contrary tendency was represented by the increasing economic interdependence of all countries with the advance of technology and specialization. Because he recognized these contradictory tendencies, Kautsky did not flatly claim that each nationality should have its own state. Furthermore, in response to the increasing clamor for a German-dominated *Mitteleuropa*, he postulated a United States of Europe, an

association of sovereign national republics cooperating economically for the good of all. He even suggested that this was a possible future stage of capitalist development, a peaceful division of world markets quite in contrast to the imperialist war raging through Europe at the time. Kautsky's treatment of the question of nationality, while it did not begin to deal with all the complexities of the problem, especially the emotional, almost irrational aspects, was not simpleminded.¹⁹

One significant change in Kautsky's political thought appeared very early in the war. In his most radical phase, during and immediately following the revisionist crisis, Kautsky had harshly condemned bourgeois parliamentary government as a fraud because of the expense, the time between elections, and the ignorance of the voters. By early 1915, however, the tendency of the right wing to disregard the duly elected representatives of non-German peoples and call on some semimystical notions of destiny to justify expansion, caused Kautsky to change his attitude. Recognizing that parliamentarism was flawed and easy to criticize, that at times more "primitive democratic" means, like direct legislation or the mass strike, might be necessary to break deadlocks under parliamentarism, he contended that these means could not permanently replace parliamentarism; it was an imperfect necessity. This not only represented a significant change in his attitude toward the existing political institutions of much of Europe, it also served as a basis for Kautsky's response to the Russian soviets and the German *Räte* that appeared in 1918. Having decided that parliamentary government, despite its weaknesses, was the only viable long-term form that democracy could take in complex modern societies, he was to regard the Russian-inspired forms as at best temporary institutions.²⁰

The Party Split

By early 1917, Kautsky was forced by party developments to recognize that a split had to come. First of all, the war continued, and in fact the announcement by Germany in January 1917 of the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare guaranteed that the war would be prolonged. This move ended any possibility of a peace based on the military stalemate that had characterized 1916. As long as the war continued, the basic cause of the split within the SPD persisted. Moreover, the majority socialists continued their assault on the minority, denying the opposition access to the press, refusing it a forum in the Reichstag, and even expelling it from local party organizations. In mid-October 1916, the party central committee joined forces with the military high command to censor the party's official daily, the Berlin

Vorwärts. Kautsky had warned earlier that continued persecution by the majority would only further radicalize the opposition, and his prophecy proved true. The final factor which forced a split was the increasing opposition to the war among the working class and the increased vociferousness of the radical opposition within the SPD. Both of these tendencies were greatly stimulated by the Russian Revolution of 1917.²¹

A formal split was slow in developing, even though Liebknecht's vote against the second war credits bill on 2 December 1914 was a tocsin of things to come. In April 1915, Franz Mehring and Rosa Luxemburg founded the radical oppositional journal *Internationale*, and in early May, Kautsky, Bernstein, and other prominent theoreticians joined Rudolf Breitscheid in the more moderate oppositional journal *Sozialistische Auslandspolitik Korrespondenz* (later renamed *Der Sozialist*). These two journals constituted the first organized opposition within the German party. In mid-June a thousand low-level functionaries and other leftists issued a manifesto calling for a radical change in the party's policy toward the war, and on 19 June, Haase, Bernstein, and Kautsky issued their own more moderate, but also more influential critique of the majority policy, "The Demand of the Hour." Less than a year later, on 24 March 1916, Haase led the oppositional members of the Reichstag delegation in the formation of their own *Fraktion*, the *sozialdemokratische Arbeitsgemeinschaft*. Despite his own hesitation about splitting, Kautsky played a major role in the process that led to the formation of the USPD. At a 7 January 1917 meeting of the opposition, his manifesto on a peace without victors or vanquished, calling for an international, democratic peace with self-determination for proletarian-based governments, received the unanimous approval of the 157 delegates attending. On 9 February, the leadership of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, which had stopped just short of calling for a split at the January meeting, denounced the disciplinary tactics of the SPD and called for independent political action. In a few days the local organizations of Berlin, Leipzig, Braunschweig, Bremen, Halle, and elsewhere proclaimed their solidarity with the Haase group.²²

Kautsky responded to this sharpening conflict with a series of four articles in the *Neue Zeit* dealing with the impending split. He emphasized the majority's responsibility in forcing the split through its policy of supporting the war and adopting as its own the chauvinistic, expansionistic war aims of the government. He developed further his insistence upon democracy for the proletariat by rejecting the majority's call for cooperation with the National Liberals within the framework of the imperial regime, arguing that both the National

Liberals and the regime of the kaiser were antidemocratic. Only through democracy could the workers rule, he claimed, and therefore the majority's position entailed the abandonment of the principle of proletarian political power. Referring to the failure of the bourgeois revolution of 1848, Kautsky claimed that only its economic strength allowed the bourgeoisie to be the dominant, though not the ruling class. By contrast, the proletariat could only become the dominant class, that is, establish the socialist order, by first becoming the ruling class, that is, by seizing political power. Kautsky's reluctance to support calls for a new party derived from his conviction that the potential of the workers to establish and use a democratic state form would be greatly hampered if they had two parties instead of one. He warned that like war, a split was much easier declared than ended, and though he felt the war to be the major source of division in the ranks of the proletariat, he knew it was not the only source. His fear that a split in social democracy would emasculate both the movement and the new, democratic state he expected at war's end was to prove very well founded. He was convinced that by implicitly abandoning democracy and by constant persecution of the minority, the majority socialists were dangerously imperiling the prospects for successful proletarian revolution.²³

The sharpening conflict within the German workers' movement in late 1916 and early 1917 also led Kautsky to elaborate on his differences with the extreme left. The more disgust with the war grew, the more strident the leftists became in their assault on the war and on the governments and socialist parties that supported the war; the more strident the leftists became, the more sweeping and simplistic their arguments became. Kautsky increasingly found himself in the center, with the chauvinistic majority attacking him from one side and a putschist-inclined extreme left attacking him from the other. Although circumstances threw him together with the extreme left, he adamantly rejected its simpleminded notions about the war. He drew a parallel between those who saw the war as everywhere and in all aspects imperialistic and those who accepted the notion of "one reactionary mass." Though there was often a theoretical need to speak of only two classes, the reality of political and economic life clearly revealed intermediary, undifferentiated classes. Similarly, though the war was theoretically imperialistic, in fact there were varieties of imperialism and various degrees of imperialism in the several capitalist states. Kautsky contended that the world was extremely complex, and that simply labeling all nations as indistinguishably imperialistic and guilty in the war could do little to explain or justify proletarian action.²⁴

Kautsky argued against monolithic capitalism and specifically against the notion that imperialism was capitalism. Political, demographic, and other variations differentiated the imperialism of the capitalist states. Thus American imperialism in the Philippines was qualitatively different from Belgian imperialism in the Congo; though imperialism was generally tied to protective tariffs, colonies, and a strong military, imperialistic England had low tariffs, imperialistic Germany lacked exploitable colonies, and imperialistic America had neither a strong army nor a strong navy. Kautsky concluded from this analysis that though economic factors lay at the base of imperialistic expansion, imperialism was not an economic necessity, but only an activity that sprang from the striving for profits of certain segments within a capitalist society. Imperialism was therefore a question of power politics, and the proletariat had to deal with it accordingly. Kautsky rejected as obfuscatory nonsense the arguments of radicals like Karl Radek, who held that since Belgium had colonies, the proletariat that was fighting to defend Belgian independence was serving the interests of the imperialistic bourgeoisie. Kautsky asked if Belgium would have been spared the war if it had not had any colonies. When Radek claimed to have discovered imperialism in Switzerland in the form of foreign investments, Kautsky countered by asking if, because of their investments in Russia, German financiers favored a Russian victory, or if French capital worked for a Turkish victory because of French investments in Turkey. The increasingly extreme rhetoric of the left was too simpleminded for Kautsky. He felt that such gross generalizations and distortions would only mislead and eventually undermine the proletarian opposition in Germany. Proper Marxists had to find a balance between the extremism of both the left and the right.²⁵

Unfortunately for Kautsky and the unity of the German proletariat, the war and, after early March 1917, the Russian Revolution did not provide an environment conducive to balancing between extremes. From 6 to 9 April 1917, 143 delegates of the socialist opposition met in Gotha to give more concrete form to their movement. The group that gathered together on this occasion was highly eclectic, from the extreme leftists such as Luxemburg's Spartacists and the International Group to the moderates such as Kautsky and Haase. All factions agreed on only two things—opposition to the war and the need to prevent bureaucratic domination from subverting the new party as it had the old. Even the issue of forming an entirely separate party did not carry unanimously. Kautsky and Bernstein were on the losing side of a seventy-two to forty-four vote in favor of a complete split, includ-

ing a new name. In his opening address Haase emphasized primarily the errors of the SPD vis-à-vis the war. Wilhelm Dittman followed with organizational proposals for a decentralized, locally autonomous party, and he was seconded by Fritz Rueck of the International Group, who added a demand for a highly action-oriented party. Georg Ledebour was the principal speaker on the tasks of the party. He placed strong emphasis on representative democracy, including shorter terms of office and female franchise, but criticized the left's blanket rejection of national self-defense (*Verteidigungsnihilismus*) as well as the majority's total support for the war.²⁶ Common enemies did not breed harmony in the new party, and lack of unity on goals and means would soon be a significant factor in the failure of the USPD.

For Kautsky this founding congress was significant in two contradictory ways. First, the increasing hostility of the Luxemburg-Liebknicht left to Kautsky and his centrist followers was fully revealed to the congress by Fritz Heckert. Speaking on the tasks of the party, Heckert spent much of his time assailing Kautsky, who, according to Heckert, was no better than Ebert and Scheidemann. Heckert's basic argument was that "if you are not with us you are against us." He denounced Kautsky for imagining that imperialism could ever be peaceful and for hoping that the war could be ended in any way but by revolution. Haase rose in defense of his friend and mentor, and Kautsky gave a spirited self-defense as well. In the end Heckert's attack carried little weight, for the second way in which this congress proved significant for Kautsky was that his manifesto declaring the goals of the new party was accepted with only one dissenting vote. The manifesto blamed the split on the majority socialists and denounced their national-social aims and means, including their acceptance of the monarchy and implicit rejection of republican governmental forms. It included a call for political amnesty, democratization of the franchise, traditional press, speech, and assembly freedoms, and a socialist peace based on self-determination, limited armaments, and international arbitration.²⁷

One episode in the USPD founding congress exposed a striking difference between the leftists and the moderates of the party and also foreshadowed its future dissolution. In his attack on Kautsky, Heckert mocked the call for a peace without annexations on the basis of self-determination. Haase interrupted, asking: "Do you want annexations?" Heckert retorted: "Marx was for annexation where it was in the interests of historical progress."²⁸ This was symbolic of the "hards" against the "softs" in the USPD, of the radical-moderate split that was to characterize Marxism after World War I, and of the Bolshevik-social democratic debate that was to occupy so much of Kautsky's time in the

last two decades of his life. The arrogance and revolutionary passion of the leftists gave them confidence to presume to know the future. They refused to get caught up in the old means-end dilemma; they did so simply by rejecting the notion that means were causally related to ends, by justifying all actions only in terms of announced aims. This position was abhorrent to the more moderate opposition like Haase, Ledebour, and Kautsky, all of whom lacked not the conviction, but the single-mindedness and ruthlessness of the extreme left. The humanist consciousness of the older, social democratic mentalities of the USPD could not accept the extremism of the younger radicals.

In his postcongress summary of Gotha, Kautsky expanded on the calls for local autonomy that had been made during the gathering, arguing that limiting the size of the bureaucracy and electing good people would not be enough to prevent the USPD from falling victim to the same illness that had undermined the old party. He urged regular, active, democratic participation by the rank-and-file membership as the best check against an overly powerful leadership. This sort of grass-roots participation was especially important in controlling the party press and administering the party treasury, particularly since exclusive control of the treasury made the leaders virtually independent of the party membership. Kautsky also revealed why he chose to join the new party rather than stay with the old. While recognizing that party unity was important, he noted that the mass of the workers was becoming increasingly alienated from the SPD leadership, especially given the radicalizing influence of the Russian Revolution. He concluded that "still far more important than the unity of the party is the trust of the working mass in it."²⁹

From the creation of the new party to the outbreak of the German revolution in November 1918, Kautsky was mainly preoccupied with efforts to bring the war to an end. During the summer of 1917, he kept himself available to go to Stockholm and participate in what was ultimately an abortive effort to reactivate the Second International and have it bring pressure on the warring states to stop the slaughter. Hugo Haase, head of the USPD Stockholm delegation, was to send word to Kautsky if it seemed that he could help in the revival. However, given that the Bolsheviks played a key role in the Stockholm negotiations, Kautsky's presence would probably have proven a liability. After the negotiations failed, Axelrod scornfully reported in a letter to Kautsky that the Bolsheviks valued the extremism of a Radek more than "you, really more than Marx and Engels." Kautsky remained in Berlin during the Stockholm meetings, writing considerable propaganda encouraging the Stockholm effort. He felt that a reasonable and swift

peace was critical to the survival of revolutionary Russia, quite accurately perceiving peace to be the most important demand of the anti-tsarist forces. He was also convinced that the sooner the war ended, the easier it would be to reunite the divided German social democratic movement. Although the German government gave its approval to the SPD delegation to Stockholm, the cabinet and military leadership also used the publicity generated by the gathering in their persecution of the USPD. As late as August 1917, the government was apparently considering the possibility of prosecuting both Kautsky and Bernstein for treason on the basis of articles that had appeared in the foreign press regarding the two men's views of the war. The proceedings were dropped, however, because Kautsky and Bernstein could not have been proved to be the authors of the articles, which in any case contained no new material useful to the Allied powers or likely to strengthen their will to fight.³⁰

The efforts of the SPD to combat the new party and suppress the opposition continued with renewed vigor after the split. Almost immediately after Gotha, Clara Zetkin was removed as editor of the *Gleichheit*, and in the fall of 1917, Kautsky lost the *Neue Zeit*. Though he had edited the journal for almost thirty-five years, and was in fact internationally identified with it, once the decision had been made by the SPD leadership, Kautsky was given no notice and was not allowed to publish any parting message to his readership. Naturally he was extremely bitter about the shabby treatment he received, but since the journal legally belonged to the SPD, he could not dispute its right to remove him from the editorship. He felt that the central committee had taken this action merely to deprive him of a platform from which to address German socialists. He predicted that the journal's readership, which had already fallen drastically during the war, would decline further after his departure, since most of the *Neue Zeit* subscribers were Independents. Certain that the war made founding a new journal impossible, he felt he would be forced to rely on pamphlets to conduct his polemics, and he knew this would make his work difficult. "Therefore it is certainly possible," he wrote to Adler, "that I am put in cold storage for the duration of the war."³¹

Kautsky was not put in cold storage for the duration, but the journals to which he had access were either far less influential than the *Neue Zeit*, like the *Sozialistische Auslandspolitik*, or had leftist inclinations that did not fit comfortably with Kautsky's position, like the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. Not until the founding of the USPD's *Freiheit*, shortly after the German revolution, did Kautsky once again have regular access to a journal with fairly widespread circulation, at least in Berlin, and with

which he was in close agreement. After mid-1919, however, his ties with the *Freiheit* weakened considerably as the journal moved to the extreme left, and he began to publish more and more in Austrian journals like *Der Kampf* and the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, both of which were Viennese social democratic organs. During late 1917 and 1918, he did write several short works, including an attack on the *Umlerner* entitled *War Marxism*, and his major critique of the Bolshevik takeover in Russia, *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*. He also wrote *Social Democratic Notes on the Transitional Economy*, in which he discussed the impending conversion to peacetime production and the implied conversion from capitalism to socialism. But *War Marxism* and *Dictatorship* were first published in Vienna, and *Social Democratic Notes*, though written in March 1918, was barred by the censors until after the revolution. Thus, though he remained active, at least until November 1918, the loss of the *Neue Zeit* severely restricted his influence on German socialists.³²

The Russian Revolution

Losing his regular forum for discussion of significant developments in theory and world events hit Kautsky hard in late 1917, because it coincided with the Bolsheviks' victory in Russia and their rising influence in the world socialist movement. These developments were important to Kautsky for a number of reasons, some immediate and practical, some more theoretical. For instance, shortly after the German revolution, he worked in the foreign office and attended meetings of the cabinet at which the question of reestablishing diplomatic relations with the Russians was discussed. Because he had come to distrust the Bolsheviks and opposed their influence on the German leftists, he joined with Haase in counseling caution in dealing with the Soviet government. In addition to their distrust of the Bolsheviks, Kautsky and others obviously feared Allied reprisals if German socialists made encouraging overtures to the Russians. Finally, Kautsky, at least, did not think the Bolsheviks would remain in power long enough to justify the effort of recognizing their government; over a decade later he was still predicting the imminent collapse of the Soviet state. Another practical concern raised by Lenin's victory in Russia was the role of soviets or workers' councils in the revolution of the proletariat. This and other matters would occupy much of Kautsky's attention in late 1918 and 1919 when they became important in Germany.³³

In the long run the most important impact on Kautsky of the Bolshevik Revolution came in the realm of theory, where he was forced by the Russian experience to clarify and make explicit his views on revolu-

tion, the coming of socialism, and the role of democracy in both processes. His attitude toward the Bolsheviks was conditioned by his initial response to the March revolution in Russia, by his personal contacts with many prominent Mensheviks, by his experience with the SPD majority's repression of the antiwar minority in the party, and by the effect of the Bolsheviks on the German and international movements. Many years before 1917, he had argued that because of its decaying government and growing working-class movement, revolution was more likely in Russia than in the major nations of western Europe. In January 1916, he repeated this prediction, adding that revolution was then even more likely in Russia because of the terrible conditions brought on by the war. "Today Russia is no longer merely the land of despotism against which Marx and Engels formerly demanded a war," Kautsky wrote, "but a land of revolution." As usual he was not willing to make specific predictions about the form and timing of the coming revolution, but he was certain that it would cause "a powerful echo in western Europe."³⁴

The March 1917 revolution in Russia made a major impression on most of the world, and different people saw in it different things. The Allies, and most of the early leaders in the new Russia, were convinced that the revolution would allow the country to begin to pursue the war with renewed vigor and success. Woodrow Wilson contended that the end of tsarism allowed the United States to enter the war on the side that was now truly the side of democracy against autocracy. In Germany the major impression of the March revolution was that Russia would now leave the war, a move which the military and prowar forces contemplated with joy since it would allow Germany to concentrate all its might on the western front. Kautsky's view was that the revolution was certainly a victory for the Russian peace party, but the conclusions he drew about this victory were much different than those of the militarists. He argued that with Russian despotism gone, the SPD backers of the war would have to change their tune, since it was now clearly despotic Germany and Austria against the democracies. Furthermore, he was convinced that in order to assure the continued victory of the peace party in Russia, the German government had to offer generous peace terms. But here Kautsky was wrong. In fact the persistence of the war—the feeble and tragic efforts of the provisional government to continue the Russian war effort—was the single most important reason for the meteoric rise in the fortunes of the only Russian party willing to accept peace regardless of the cost, the Bolsheviks.³⁵

When the revolution was less than a month old, Kautsky defined it as

bourgeois and democratic—bourgeois in that it destroyed the remnants of feudalism in Russia, setting the stage for modernization and the growth of capitalism, and democratic in that it opened the channels to political power to all classes. He firmly rejected an observation by the SPD's *Vorwärts* that Russia had only replaced the domination of absolutism with the domination of the bourgeoisie. This position confused state form with the rule of a class. What had really happened was that the form of the Russian state had changed in such a way as to allow the proletariat to develop freely and openly into a majoritarian movement that could then oversee the conversion of Russia from a capitalist to a socialist society as economic conditions ripened. Kautsky's position clearly presupposed a long period of development, both political and economic, before Russia could become proletarian and then socialist. It also included an implicit distinction between a political and a later social revolution. The political revolution would give the proletariat access to political power and would be a short-term, definite event; the social revolution would emerge from the economic conditions that make the proletariat a majority and socialism a necessity, and it would be a long-term, indefinite event.³⁶

As if to anticipate his conflict with the Bolsheviks, Kautsky outlined the tasks confronting the revolutionary, largely proletarian regime in Russia.

There are two things that the proletariat urgently needs: democracy and socialism. Democracy, that is, far-reaching freedoms and political rights for the masses of the people, which alters the arrangement of state and community administration to mere tools of the mass of the people. And then socialism, that is, nationalized [*staatliche*], communal or cooperative production for the needs of society. The proletariat needs both to the same degree. Social production without democracy could become the most oppressive fetter. Democracy without socialism would leave in existence the economic dependence of the proletariat.³⁷

Although he recognized that the proletariat shared the demand for democracy with other classes, he argued that the proletariat was most eager for democracy and best able to use it. Socialism was the demand of the proletariat alone, but only democracy could be achieved immediately by seizing political power: Socialism depended on the development of capitalism. Kautsky also suggested that despite Russia's backwardness, heavy industry and mines might be nationalized, the land of the royal family, religious orders, and large landowners seized,

and reforms such as minimum wages, maximum hours, worker-protection laws, and other measures legislated. Though he admitted that most of these things were not socialistic, he contended that their quantity, coupled with the shock of the fall of the old order, would create a qualitative change in the tone and mood of Russian society.

Kautsky closed his evaluation of the prospects of the Russian revolution by arguing that despite the small urban population in Russia and despite the very small size of the organized, conscious workers' movement, democratic forms were still very much to the advantage of the proletariat. In fact, he argued that because the countryside was so backward, because the peasants were so ignorant and amorphous, the conscious, organized proletariat would all the better be able to sway the politics of the country. Furthermore, he concluded that *at the moment* democracy was even more important than the economic improvement of the proletariat because in order to rule, the workers had not only to be numerous and have the necessary material conditions, but they had also to develop the ability of self-rule. This could only come from mass participation, not from secret committees. The great imponderable of the revolution was, however, the peasantry. On it rested the fate of the new order, because it comprised the army, and if the army supported the counterrevolution, the workers would be crushed. But if the workers had free access to political activity, Kautsky was convinced the peasants could be won over.³⁸

Although his specific analysis of the Russian situation in the spring of 1917 was based on a number of misconceptions—for instance, the new government was not democratic, except by proclamation, and was furthermore very slow to organize elections for a democratic assembly, though admittedly it was also confronted with enormous complications—what is important in Kautsky's critique is what it revealed about his conception of the nature of the revolution in Russia and other nondemocratic countries. He had moved a step closer to making explicit his earlier implicit distinction between political and social revolution. Marxists had long argued that proletarian socialist society could only emerge from the womb of bourgeois capitalist society, just as bourgeois capitalist society had grown out of aristocratic feudal society. This view presupposed that the economic substructure of society would undergo gradual but regular changes—intensified internal contradictions in Marxian terms—that would eventually create a situation in which the political-social-ideological superstructure would be obsolete vis-à-vis the economic substructure. At some unspecifiable point this contradiction would lead to revolution that would bring the substructure and the superstructure into closer rela-

tionship. Marx and most of his followers made the best historical case for this process by pointing to the example of the French Revolution of 1789, but by analogy the process could also be applied to the coming transition from capitalism to socialism.

Two aspects of this view of historical development are important as far as Kautsky's theory of revolution was concerned. First, the revolution that resulted from the inherent contradictions of any system would be a political revolution because it would force the superstructure of society—the juridical and political forms, the distribution of political power, the dominant ideology that reflected the distribution of political power—to catch up with the economic substructure. To this extent, Marxism presupposed that the realm of conscious activity was politics, not economics: What revolution does is change the superstructure, not the substructure. Kautsky's analysis of Russia after March 1917 reflected this view. His assumption was that Russia's economic substructure had become sufficiently capitalist to create tensions between it and the essentially precapitalist superstructure that could only be resolved by a revolution that would bring the dominant economic class, the bourgeoisie, to political and social dominance. This conflict had, of course, been greatly accelerated by the ineptness and collapse of the tsarist superstructure during the war. However, a second aspect of the Marxian view of revolution also played an important role in Kautsky's analysis. Obviously all countries did not develop internal contradictions at the same rate. Most Marxists recognized that the French Revolution was only another example of what had happened over a century earlier in England, and half a century later, incompletely, in Germany. In Russia, however, the same revolution was delayed so long by historical circumstances that for the first time in history a bourgeois revolution had occurred in a country with a conscious and organized working class. This fact encouraged Kautsky to believe that aggressive and vigorous action on the part of the workers, in conjunction with the peasantry, could force the Russian bourgeoisie to complete swiftly the transition to capitalist society. This in turn would accelerate the process of internal contradiction within the new order that could only end in socialism.

Because of his firm conviction that history could only serve the cause of the proletariat, Kautsky was certain that even in apparently backward Russia the proletariat would soon become a majority and that it would do so as the country became more capitalist. Therefore, as the economic substructure more and more created socialism through concentration and collectivization, the growing proletarian majority would increasingly assume political power, if the political superstructure were

democratic. In this way, Kautsky argued, the violence that had characterized all previous reconciliations of contradiction between substructure and superstructure could be minimized. He could make these claims and still adhere to Marxism because he concentrated his attention on politics, the realm in which conscious activity determined developments. Like Marx and Engels, he argued not only that bourgeois capitalist society created its own gravediggers in the proletariat, but also that by means of a favorite bourgeois political form, the democratic republic, the workers would assume power. Once they had attained this power, the workers could then use it to ease further the process of reconciling the contradictions that developed in the maturing society. For Kautsky, Russia was a special case in modern history only to the extent that the dominance of bourgeois capitalist society would be of shorter duration there than in more advanced countries.

Phrased in such general terms, Kautsky's view of the Russian Revolution does not seem much different from that of the Bolsheviks. They, too, emphasized the political nature of the Revolution; they, too, emphasized the need for the proletariat to push the Revolution to completion; they, too, claimed that for the moment all that could be done in Russia was to abolish the old order and make way for bourgeois capitalism; they, too, argued that in Russia the course of history would be shortened, or "telescoped," as it was often called at the time. But in fact the Bolshevik seizure of power and Kautsky's response to it gave rise to the longest, most complicated, and ultimately most hopeless of the many ideological disputes Kautsky engaged in. This conflict represented the split between social democratic Marxism and communist Marxism, between the "hards" and the "softs" of the world socialist movement. It was a very involved dispute, with Kautsky on one side and Lenin, Trotsky, Radek, and later Bukharin as the major figures on the other. That Lenin in 1918, Trotsky in 1920, and Radek in 1921, would all take time from their busy days in revolution and civil war to write works attacking Karl Kautsky's theories attests the Russians' respect for his influence among European socialists and his position as leading theorist of the Second International. Prior to 1914 all these Russians had accepted Kautsky as the master of theoretical Marxism and were therefore driven to renounce their aged teacher as apostate. They now revealed their own obsession with theoretical justification, and perhaps also their lack of understanding of developments in western socialist movements, when they continued their attacks long after Kautsky had ceased to exert a major influence on the world movement. For his part, Kautsky continued to criticize the Soviet

system, and to predict its imminent collapse, to the very end of his life.³⁹

The two works that began the debate identified all the important differences between the two positions. The great mass of writings that followed embellished and expanded the basic positions, but rarely added anything new of general importance. Kautsky's response to the Bolshevik takeover appeared in book form as *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* in the late summer of 1918. This was based on a series of articles that had appeared in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* and the *Sozialistische Auslandspolitik* in early 1918. With various title changes and minor alterations in content, *Dictatorship* was published in at least five different editions in 1918 and 1919. Lenin's response to Kautsky was *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*. It was written in the late fall of 1918, and first appeared in the West shortly after the German revolution in November. Actually this was the third major work since the beginning of the war in which Lenin argued that Kautsky was no longer a Marxist. Lenin had criticized Kautsky's theory of imperialism in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* in 1917, and Kautsky's view of the state in *The State and Revolution* in early 1918. In addition, in numerous articles between 1914 and 1918, Lenin had severely criticized Kautsky's stand on the war (without ever being quite clear on what that stand was) and his view of the fate of the Second International. The *Renegade* was, however, the harshest and most thorough attack on Kautsky ever made by anyone.⁴⁰

Kautsky criticized the Bolsheviks on three main counts. First, he asserted that socialism's goals were not the socialization of the means of production and the political domination of the proletariat. These were the means to the real end which was "the abolition of every kind of exploitation and oppression." For this reason, he argued, any regime, whether it called itself a dictatorship of the proletariat or whatever, could not be truly socialist if it were based on oppression; only democratic forms could yield true socialism. Second, Kautsky contended that Russia was bourgeois or petit bourgeois country with an especially prominent peasantry. Therefore, any effort to rule Russia against or even without the support of the peasantry would be futile and short-lived. And third, he saw the efforts of the Bolsheviks to rule Russia as an example of the dangers of letting revolutionary will outstrip the limits of objective conditions. According to Kautsky, will was a necessary, but far from sufficient, element in the course of human history. His critique of Bolshevik rule was neither ill-considered nor unsympathetic; he freely recognized the difficulties confronting the new regime and was little inclined to assign personal blame or to pass moral

judgment. But he was convinced that the Bolsheviks could not long hold power and that while they did, the cause of the proletariat would not be well served. Less than ten days after the Bolshevik seizure, Kautsky wrote to his close Menshevik friend, Pavel Axelrod: "In the present crisis I am very critical of the Bolsheviks and fear they will founder and pave the way for the counterrevolution."⁴¹

The notion that even the process of socialization was only a means to a higher end was not exactly new with Kautsky. Beginning with Marx himself, the assumption that socialism would serve human liberation was a now explicit, now implicit, assumption in the speech and writings of most people who adhered to the movement. These people had assumed all along that postcapitalist society would liberate humanity from the oppressive burdens of labor and class rule. But not until socialists actually assumed power somewhere did it become clear that the transition period from capitalism to socialism would necessarily involve oppression. Given their own definition of the state as a tool of class rule, the Marxists recognized that once the workers controlled the state it would be used to control the opponents of the proletariat. Kautsky did not argue that no repression would be necessary, but he did argue that the more oppression and violence a workers' government had to employ, the less historically justified such a regime would be, and the less likely long-term survival would be.

As the title suggests, one of Kautsky's major concerns in his first analysis of the Bolshevik state was with the concept and reality of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Like Lenin, Kautsky accepted the phrase as descriptive of the transition period between capitalism and socialism, but unlike Lenin, Kautsky emphasized that the dictatorship of the proletariat was a "political condition, not a form of government." In part Kautsky substantiated his position by picking quotes from Marx and Engels; in part he argued by analogy, for instance, if the Commune of 1871 were a dictatorship of the proletariat, then such a condition could not rule out general suffrage since that is what the Commune had. But the major thrust of his argument was more telling. Dictatorship implies government by one person or one party, but certainly not one class, since classes can only rule, not govern. Governing implies an organization and cohesion that classes do not have, thus at best only a political party can govern. But party and class are not coterminous entities—a class can split up into various parties, as had the workers in Russia and Germany. Under such conditions, Kautsky argued (with an eye to the split in German socialism), the dictatorship of the proletariat in fact becomes the dictatorship of one faction of the proletariat over the others, as well as over the nonproletarian classes.

Therefore, since Marx clearly had in mind the rule of the entire class of conscious workers during the transition period, Kautsky concluded that the dictatorship of the proletariat could only refer to the general condition in which the workers used their superior consciousness and organization in democratic forms to mold society in their own image. He was particularly insistent that while the soviets had an important future as agencies through which the workers could advance the economic aspects of the transition period, they were inadequate as the basis for a new form of government because they were too exclusive.⁴²

Although he approved of the idea of a proletarian-peasant coalition in Russia to force the revolution to completion, Kautsky adamantly insisted that given the economic conditions, given the overwhelming numerical preponderance of the peasantry and their unshakable desire for private property, even proletarian-peasant cooperation could only yield a bourgeois revolution. With this in mind, he made a specific distinction between social revolution, a "protracted" and "profound transformation of the entire social structure brought about by the establishment of a new method of production," and the political revolution, which precedes and precipitates the social revolution, and is "a sudden act, which is rapidly concluded." He objected to the opportunistic approval by the soviets of peasant land seizures, arguing that such seizures were usually carried out by those peasants who already had good-sized holdings. He saw only two possible courses for the revolution under the leadership of the Bolsheviks. Either it would become increasingly dominated by the peasantry, thus turning from a progressive bourgeois revolution into a regressive, petit bourgeois revolution, or, in order to feed the depressed urban population, the Soviet government would more and more have to rely on violent expropriation of the products of the peasantry. In the latter case, the Soviet government would be breeding civil war, further chaos, and ultimately totally oppressive rule. Neither of the two alternatives corresponded to Kautsky's vision of the victory of the revolution. He felt the workers should have given moral and physical support to the peasantry in its struggle against the old order, but also worked with the poorest elements among the peasantry to encourage cooperative farming, thereby advancing socialist consciousness among them. Given Russian conditions the workers had to recognize the importance of the peasants, but the proletariat could neither opportunistically adopt private property slogans as its own nor force the peasants through violence to give up the yield of their privately held land. The maintenance of production for the market was a temporary but necessary concession to the nature of Russian economics.⁴³

Kautsky concluded that the errors of the Bolsheviks proved they had tried to make a workers' revolution by relying on sheer will in opposition to objective conditions that militated against such a revolution. His position was not the simpleminded one of those like the Russian "economists" who argued that since socialism was the inevitable result of historical development the workers had to do nothing to bring it about; Kautsky frequently disputed this interpretation in its various forms. He argued that "the will to socialism is the first condition for its accomplishment," and that "ripeness for socialism is not a condition which lends itself to statistical calculation . . . it is wrong . . . to put the material prerequisites of socialism too much in the foreground." But he also contended that to a great extent the necessary will was dependent upon the development of industry. In his earlier debate with party comrades about the 1905 revolution, Kautsky had argued that the necessary enthusiasm for revolutionary activity would follow naturally from comprehension of the course of historical development. Now he argued that an artificially generated enthusiasm for proletarian revolution would be futile in the face of the objective conditions of Russia. He was certain that not even the "strongest will" could make the revolution in Russia anything but a bourgeois revolution.⁴⁴

By the time Lenin wrote his critique of *The Dictatorship*, he and most of his followers had abandoned their earlier view that the Russian Revolution was bourgeois in form and content. Now that political power had been seized in the name of the proletariat, it should be held in the name of the proletariat by any means necessary. Thus Lenin assumed that the Revolution was not essentially bourgeois; Kautsky assumed that it was. This difference of fundamental view meant that some of Lenin's sharpest and most frequent criticisms missed the mark because they presupposed an agreement that did not exist. For instance, Lenin repeatedly argued that Kautsky's insistence on legality and democracy, his rejection of violence, and his defense of the constituent assembly over the soviets, constituted "objective" support of the bourgeoisie. But since Kautsky assumed that the entire Revolution was bourgeois, Lenin's quite valid observation did not undermine the essence of Kautsky's position. On the other hand, Lenin did score heavily on some points, as when he ridiculed Kautsky's assumption that the months from March to October were the democratic period in the Revolution. However, Lenin's view of this period was often equally distorted because he identified it as the period of Menshevik rule, which it certainly was not.⁴⁵

Another significant contrast between the two men was the very different personalities revealed by the form and content of their ar-

guments. Lenin's work was characterized by an iron conviction of his own correctness, by a strong propensity to mockery and ridicule, and by vicious *ad hominem* attacks. Although he frequently referred to bygone days when Kautsky had been a Marxist (generally 1909 and before), Lenin also used phrases like "civilized belly-crawling and boot-licking before the capitalists" to charge that Kautsky crossed the line from unconscious to conscious service to the cause of the bourgeoisie. Kautsky's critique of the Bolsheviks and their regime was almost entirely devoid of personal attacks of any sort. Lenin's conviction allowed him to accept and justify internecine struggle among socialist factions, civil war in Russia, and further destruction and disruption of Russia's productive capacity, all in the name of a greater good. Kautsky lacked this fanatical conviction and retained an acute awareness of the tendency for such extreme measures to develop a self-energizing need for survival.⁴⁶

Lenin closed his criticism with what he thought was a telling and final observation:

The above lines were written on November 9, 1918. That same night news was received from Germany announcing the beginning of a victorious revolution, first in Kiel and other northern towns and ports, where the power has passed into the hands of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, then in Berlin, where, too, power has passed into the hands of a Soviet.

The conclusion which still remained to be written to my pamphlet on Kautsky and on the proletarian revolution is now superfluous.⁴⁷

This judgment was to prove rash and ill-informed, but the outbreak of revolution in Germany did offer Kautsky further opportunity to examine the nature of revolution, this time in an advanced industrial society that still lacked the forms of government Marxists usually associated with the economic dominance of the bourgeoisie. His evaluation of Germany was amazingly consistent with the general principles outlined in his writings on the Russian Revolution.

Revolution in Germany

Kautsky's debate with the Bolsheviks was rapidly, if only temporarily, pushed into the background by the growing revolutionary sentiments in Germany. Dissatisfaction with severe rationing of foodstuffs and the growing burden of labor and self-sacrifice created tensions

among the workers that increasingly took the form of strikes and protest marches. On a few occasions before 1917, protests with political motives had occurred, as in the summer of 1916 when the drafting and prosecution of Karl Liebknecht had roused the workers to demonstration. But only after the Russian revolution of March 1917 did workers' protests regularly include political demands, as well as objections to the shortages and hardships of war. In the spring of 1917 the first of the workers' councils (*Arbeiterräte*), modeled on the Russian soviets, appeared in Leipzig. The political demands of such groups, with rare exceptions, were liberal republican and moderate socialist, not the extremist demands for total revolution favored by the Spartacists in Germany and the Bolsheviks in Russia. In Germany in 1918-1919, local and national organizations of the workers' councils were consistently dominated by the more moderate workers who sought only a democratic republic which would allow the proletariat to identify fully with its state and country. Even at the height of revolutionary activity, the extreme left never came close to having enough support to get the councils to declare themselves masters of Germany. To this extent, the German revolution of 1918 always remained more moderate than the Russian activities of the previous year. By the same token, the achievement of radical revolution in Germany would have required even more aggressive and brutal force than that employed by the Bolsheviks in Russia. Neither the SPD nor the majority of the USPD was willing to accept the violence and threat of civil war implicit in demands for radical revolution.⁴⁸

Besides lacking a large radical faction among the working class, Germany in 1918 differed from Russia in 1917 in another decisive way—the fate of the nation in the war. The utter collapse of the economy, the incompetence of the tsarist regime, massive desertion by the war-weary peasant-soldiers were all clear in Russia by late 1915 and throughout 1916. Most Russians did not want to fight on by early 1917, and the society could not support the material and human demands of war any longer. When revolution came in March, the attitude of the army was decisive—enormous numbers of soldiers and sailors deserted, and most of those who remained refused to fight to save the tsar. Russia collapsed, crushed by the war. In Germany the picture was quite different. Despite the incredible demands made on the combatants and the civilian population, despite the duration and rapaciousness of the war, Germany was still able to launch a major offensive in the spring of 1918. Even when the initial successes turned to defeat, the military leadership refused to admit it, and the political leaders of Germany remained subordinate to the high command of the army.

The Kiel sailors' mutiny that marked the beginning of the revolution in Germany was not an expression of radical defeatism, but a demand by the sailors that their lives not be wasted in a lost cause. The lack of a pervasive sense among the populace as a whole that the war was being lost was of great importance for the revolution. Certainly this meant that when defeat did come, it was a great shock. But equally the majority of the population of Germany, including the majority of the workers, had not been conditioned by the war experience to accept radical, decisive change. Losing the war did not create the anarchy necessary for the seizure of power by a small, determined group of extremists.

None of this prevented a great many German socialists—from the left wing of the SPD through the USPD moderates like Kautsky and Haase to the extreme left of the Spartacists and the revolutionary shop stewards—from assuming that the events of early November 1918 heralded the arrival of the socialist revolution. This hodgepodge of forces disagreed vehemently on how to proceed with the establishment of socialism. Disagreement occurred over the instruments of revolution—the constituent assembly or workers' and soldiers' councils. The pace of the transformation was debated—gradually over years or very rapidly. Proper techniques were also disputed—violence or persuasion, socialization with compensation or expropriation by force. But in this debate only the extreme left abandoned the traditional commitment of the German movement to the concept of democracy: adult suffrage in a republic. Thus most socialists, increasingly aware that they were not a majority, gradually gave up demands for swift socialization and accepted as inevitable, given the situation, what was for them an incomplete revolution.

Because the German revolution came at the end of the war, just as Kautsky had predicted as early as 1907, the SPD-USPD coalition that assumed power in early November 1918 was confronted with staggering internal and external problems. For one thing, the revolution failed to eliminate or even seriously weaken many of the prerevolutionary bastions of power—most notably the military, the state bureaucracy, the courts, and the large industrialists—and thus the socialists who took office were restricted to moderate and cautious activities. The split of German social democracy before the revolution greatly weakened the ability of socialists to take advantage of the turmoil of November. They failed to achieve some of the fundamental reforms that were possible within the narrow limits of the peculiar situation of Germany. Because the SPD had capitulated to chauvinism during the war and virtually abandoned its traditional opposition to

the imperial regime, Ebert, Scheidemann, Noske, and other leading figures of the party were not willing to press their momentary advantage. The confusion and sense of incompleteness, and ultimately the failure of Weimar Germany, derived primarily from the fact that the only class that was enthusiastic about the revolution, the proletariat, was divided on most fundamental questions raised by the abdication of the kaiser and the loss of the war.

Kautsky had, of course, feared that just such a situation would arise if revolution came at a time when the proletariat was politically split. Therefore at least until the end of December 1918, when the agreement between the SPD and the military began to yield its bloody fruit, Kautsky counseled in favor of reunification of the USPD with the SPD. He felt that reunification was possible because the major cause of the schism, the war, was gone, and that reunification was necessary if the revolutionary moment were not to be lost. In fact, though he accepted the necessity of revolutionary violence to end the old order and begin the new one, he recognized that long and excessive violence would add to the difficulties of the transition by breeding a civil war that would end any chance of the reunification of the socialist movement. In a broadsheet distributed in Berlin during the hectic early days of revolutionary unrest, Kautsky called for restraint and an absolute minimum of violence. With the Russian experience clearly in mind, he wrote that "violence always leads to civil war." Unfortunately the extreme left of the USPD was not willing to accept the incomplete revolution of November, and the SPD leadership was willing to use its alliance with the military to suppress the leftists. For a time in early 1919, the civil war Kautsky feared raged in the streets of Berlin.⁴⁹

In assuming that the basis for the socialist revolution had been won in November, Kautsky badly miscalculated conditions in Germany. Even though his fear that continued violence would breed civil war was a sound one, he falsely assumed that no further forceful measures had to be taken to secure the democratic, worker-dominated forms he thought necessary for the transition from capitalism to socialism. The survival of the military and much of the old bureaucracy with their prestige only slightly tarnished necessarily undermined the potential for the creation of a new state free of atavistic remnants of the prerevolutionary order. Their survival ensured that a large and extremely important part of the machinery of the new state would be in the hands of people who regretted the passing of the old Reich. In practical terms, Kautsky's opposition to any but an absolute minimum of violence was as dangerous for the revolution he desired as was the blatantly counterrevolutionary, violent suppression of the leftists by the

SPD government. He was disgusted by the government-backed violence, but his false conviction that the day had been won in November brought him to see the actions of the left as irresponsible putschism rather than as efforts to complete the revolution.

According to Kautsky, leftist pressures to force the revolution to more radical extremes were a major factor contributing to the difficulties of the German revolution. He was particularly harsh in his condemnation of the Spartacists because he felt that their putschist tendencies, especially in January 1919, were responsible for the counter-revolutionary actions of the SPD, though he was also appalled by the eagerness with which Noske used the *Freikorps* to suppress the workers. By late 1918, Kautsky had developed a critique of the Bolshevik regime in Russia that condemned Lenin and his followers for fratricide, that is, for killing fellow socialists and oppositional workers. In January 1919, Kautsky passed the same judgment on the SPD, but he placed a good deal of responsibility for the situation on the shoulders of the Spartacists for inciting the workers to violence. He flatly rejected the Spartacists' argument that just as the eighteenth-century French and the 1917 Russian revolutions passed from moderate to increasingly radical phases, so the German revolution had to do the same thing. To suspend democracy, destroy production, and risk a new war because of some supposed "natural law" of revolutions struck Kautsky as absurd. He argued that the German revolution was different primarily because it was the work of only one class, the proletariat. Though he recognized that there were differences within the class, represented by the SPD and the USPD, these differences were only ones of timing and methods, not the class differences of the earlier revolutions. The greatest danger in Germany was that the extreme left, by misreading the nature of the revolution, would force the right into counterrevolution. By calling for rapid, extensive socialization of industry, the Spartacists were undermining one of the basic requirements of the revolution—orderly transition. By rejecting a democratic parliament in favor of action in the streets, the Spartacists were pursuing a course fraught with dangers and putting the fate of the revolution in the hands of the previously unorganized and unenlightened masses. This was the degradation, not the advancement of the revolution.⁵⁰

Violence was the first, but by no means the only, aspect of the leftists' position to which Kautsky objected. He was also distressed by their rejection of a democratically elected constituent assembly as the ultimate source of political power in the new German state. The Spartacists, once again following the lead of the Russians, looked to the newly created workers' and soldiers' councils as a revolutionary alternative to

the national assembly, which they felt was an essentially bourgeois governmental form. Kautsky himself had on occasion observed that elected representative bodies were hardly the best agents for the achievement of the socialist society. But the constant growth of the socialist movement in the years before the First World War had encouraged him to believe that someday the workers could vote in socialism if only they had access to political control of the state. The repressive tactics of the SPD during the war had caused him to emphasize more than ever the need for constant grass-roots activity by the masses in order to overcome what he saw as the tyrannical tendencies of an overly powerful leadership. So strong was his faith in the masses that he was convinced during and after the war that only a truly democratic system would allow for the development of the free, socialist society he sought. The increasing disaffection of the populace with the imperial government during the last months of the war encouraged Kautsky even further in his belief that the day would come when socialism would be backed by a majority of the population. The relatively easy overthrow of the old regime and the obvious popularity of the new order among the workers convinced him that the old repressive form of parliament could be transformed into an instrument for domination by the socialist-conscious working class.

Kautsky was willing to accept the councils as revolutionary, and therefore temporary, bodies, but in politics he thought their utility strictly limited to the period of transition from the old Reich to the new republic. He did foresee an important economic function for the workers' councils, as local administrators of a gradual socialization plan necessary for the implementation of socialism. But he objected to the councils as permanent political bodies. First, by their very nature the councils disenfranchised enormous numbers of people, not just entrepreneurs and landowners, but professionals, white-collar workers, peasants, artisans, servants, and even housewives. If the republic were to be secured, these people had to accept it as the legitimate government; limiting political power to the workers would not only contradict the democratic principles of the socialist tradition, but also create a large and potentially very dangerous opposition to the new order. Therefore, to solidify the gains of November, a constituent assembly was a necessity. Second, he argued that limiting political participation to the workers and their soldier allies would only accentuate the differences within the already badly divided proletariat. In a national assembly, however, the predominant interests would be those of class rather than faction, and the solidarity of the workers would be reinforced. This would facilitate the task of giving the new state the proper socialist

direction. Finally, Kautsky claimed that since immediate, total socialization was impossible, during the period when Germany had a mixed economy the mixture had to be reflected in its political bodies, that is, in a democratically elected assembly.⁵¹

This issue, the workers' and soldiers' councils versus the constituent assembly, finally brought Kautsky's break with the USPD in mid-1919. During the earlier months of the revolution, his strong support for a national assembly was broadly accepted by the USPD, albeit with the reservation that the elections be delayed to allow time to educate the electorate about the revolution. But from late December 1918, and through most of 1919, the majority of the party was radicalized and turned toward the councils. This was in large part a reaction to the repressive measures taken by the SPD leaders, with whom the cause of the national assembly was closely identified. But after the January elections, when the SPD and USPD together did not win a majority, many oppositional socialists turned to the councils as the only means of preserving and furthering the revolution. By the second congress of the USPD, in March 1919, sentiment for the councils was clearly on the rise; by the third congress, November 1919, the party accepted the concept of the dictatorship of the councils. By this time Kautsky had broken with his new party without returning to the old.⁵²

Through much of 1919, Kautsky's usually awesome optimism was seriously challenged by his increasingly despairing view of the fate of socialists in Germany. In May he rejected a unity invitation from the SPD faction of the *Räte*, claiming that under present conditions such a step would seem to be capitulation to Noske. In May he also rejected any possibility of unity with the communists who had split with the USPD in January. At this time he introduced a pet proposal that he was to hold to throughout the year. This was the idea that unity between the left wing of the SPD and the right wing of the USPD, based on a reconstruction of the prewar Marxist center, was the only feasible step, given current conditions. The right wing of the SPD, the party majority, was too eager to suppress the workers; the left wing of the USPD was no different from the violent putschists of the Spartacist movement. Therefore, Kautsky concluded that those caught in the middle were the only candidates for unity. But the increasing radicalization of the left and the continued suppression of the workers by the SPD government brought Kautsky to the brink of despair by mid-October. In an article that was part of a series on the question of socialist unity, Kautsky wrote: "Never was the unity of the social democratic organizations of Germany more necessary than now; never was it less possible." He saw no way out of the dilemma of a three-way split in socialism, of

governmental socialists butchering and imprisoning oppositional socialists, of the lack of a strong socialist international to bring pressure for reunification. Probably during no other period of his life did Kautsky come so close to losing hope.⁵³

The debate within the USPD over the councils had many aspects — the Russian model, the spontaneous nature of the councils, seizing power versus building socialism, dictatorship and democracy as form or condition, and many others. But in fact the central issue was a vague but extremely important one of tone or mood. Kautsky represented a school of socialist thought that was highly rationalistic and analytical, with a decided inclination to order. This school placed a good deal of emphasis on the deterministic aspects of Marx's writings. An orderly man in his private life and intellectual activities, Kautsky was convinced that sufficient consciousness and leadership could yield an orderly revolution. But revolutions are not orderly, and they often demand flexible, highly innovative thought and action. Frustrated in their hopes that the workers themselves would push forward to the fuller revolution socialism needed, the left of the USPD turned to the councils, which, of course, had already rejected the concept of "all power to the soviets." The left eventually looked to a Bolshevik-style revolutionary party to save their dreams.

At the Berlin congress of the USPD, in the spring of 1919, Kautsky presented the case for the moderates, and Clara Zetkin captured the revolutionary mood of the left. At this meeting he reiterated his opposition to the soviets in his report on the recent Bern conference, which had attempted to revive the Second International. He argued that he was not opposed to the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but claimed that dictatorship was not a form of government. It was a general condition in which the will of the proletariat would stamp itself on the nation through a united and concerted effort of the workers and their political party within democratic, representative forms. Zetkin responded by arguing that the central choice was not between democracy and dictatorship, but between "empty, bourgeois, formal, political democracy" and "vigorous, combative, proletarian, socialist democracy." Zetkin's speech was far less a detailed analysis of conditions and options in Germany than an emotional plea to the party not to lose the noble vision of the socialist society in the morass of principles and hard realities. Zetkin spoke for the frustrated and singleminded in the party. She spoke for those who saw in the Russian Revolution proof that an active, sufficiently determined, ruthless party could win the day. The disappointed hopes of the early weeks of the German revolution and the new state drove many within the USPD to

accept the Russian model, abandon the majoritarian ideals of the social democratic movement, and look to the new forms of council and disciplined revolutionary party for salvation.⁵⁴

Of course both sides erred in their evaluation of conditions in Germany. Despite the proof offered by the January 1919 constituent assembly elections that the socialist cause was not a majoritarian movement, Kautsky clung to the belief that it would become the majority without extreme measures. He continued to believe until his death that the freedom to propagandize and the continued maturation of capitalism had to bring socialism, eventually. He held to this opinion in the face of all evidence to the contrary. On the other hand, the leftists simply did not reckon with the German facts and the requirements of the revolution. The Bolsheviks, notwithstanding their own claims, had not made the Russian Revolution, because revolutions are not made, they happen. The Bolsheviks were prepared, when no one else in Russia was, to seize power and use it ruthlessly to shape the nation in their own image. In Germany only the figureheads of power had fallen—the army and bureaucracy survived the lost war and the abdication of the kaiser—and all the socialist determination in the world could not have overcome the odds. Perhaps a united working class headed by a united socialist party could have achieved more. But as it was, a badly split proletariat and its even more factionalized political parties could only accept defeat or an incomplete revolution. At least the second alternative had the advantage of less bloodshed.

Conceivably something more vigorous could have been done, even within the apparently narrow limits of action open to the German socialists. For instance, in his speech to the USPD congress of March 1919, Kautsky pointed out that the officer corps had not been purged of the men still loyal to the old Reich. He called for a revamping of the military hierarchy to ensure that it became "completely democratic and social democratic," identifying one of the major weaknesses of Weimar Germany, namely, that its last line of defense was a military that always remained only marginally loyal. Kautsky called the failure to purge the officer ranks one of the basic mistakes of the SPD government. And yet his own parliamentary inclination really offered no solution to this dilemma. The USPD had not done well in the January elections, winning only 22 seats, hardly 5 percent of the total. The party's ability to bring about military reform by parliamentary means was therefore extremely limited. Even if Kautsky's advice had been followed, and the two socialist parties had come together in the new republic, the combined socialist representation in the constituent assembly was only 185 seats, less than 44 percent. As the SPD had earlier formed an alliance

with the military, Kautsky's call for a purge yielded nothing. On the other hand, had the USPD been able to influence the workers' and soldiers' councils, it is possible they could have been used to apply pressure from without to achieve reforms that would have made Weimar Germany more stable and stronger. But Kautsky's narrow view of the councils prohibited him from seeing the possibilities of these new bodies.⁵⁵

The revolution of 1918 catapulted Kautsky into the political arena to an extent he had never known before. As an elder statesman of German socialism—he was sixty-four when the revolution broke out—he was looked to by the USPD leadership and accepted by the SPD leadership as an expert in several fields. His long record of commentary on economic matters won him the post of chairman of the socialization commission which was appointed nine days after the deposition of the kaiser. He also became an outside advisor (*Beigeordneter*) in the foreign office, charged with supervising the publication of official papers pertaining to the question of responsibility for the origins of the war. Largely because of his official position, he became a citizen of the new German state in 1919. As socialist contact in the foreign office, he attended several meetings of the Council of the People's Representatives, or the cabinet, which headed the government from early November 1918 until the constituent assembly elected Ebert president on 11 February 1919. But Kautsky's tenure as a government official was extremely brief. As a member of the USPD, he followed Emil Barth, Wilhelm Dittmann, and Hugo Haase, when on 28 and 29 December 1918 they left the government to protest the bloody suppression of a sailors' revolt of 23 and 24 December. Thus he held his positions for less than two months, though he continued to edit the war documents through the spring of 1919, and in January reported to representatives of the government and the *Zentralrat*, the central committee of the national congress of the workers' councils, on the conclusions of the socialization commission.⁵⁶

By decree of the Council of People's Representatives, the socialization commission was constituted on 18 November 1918. The *Freiheit* announced the original commission as consisting of five socialists—Kautsky, Emil Lederer, Rudolf Hilferding, Heinrich Cunow, and Otto Hue—and four bourgeois economists and businessmen, including Walter Rathenau. Rathenau, a major architect of the German domestic war effort, was not particularly popular with the antiwar socialists; the hostility of the Independents on the commission forced him to resign soon after being appointed. Eventually three other men were appointed, including the then little-known Austrian economist Joseph

Schumpeter. When the first meeting was held on 5 December, Kautsky was chosen as chairman. After almost a month of meetings, as a whole and in parts, and despite a lack of cooperation from, and covert and overt sabotage by, the official economic ministry, Kautsky submitted the commission report to the government on 10 January 1919. The conclusions of the commission were very moderate, recommending no fixed program of socialization but one that adapted itself to the varying development of the different industries. The plan also specifically rejected the notion that socialization meant nationalization (that is, control by the state), and its one definite recommendation was the socialization of coal mines, with compensation and autonomous committees of entrepreneurs and workers to run them; everything else would have to wait. In fact, of course, even this had to wait. In the January elections, a socialist majority failed to materialize and as a result so did even modest socialization.⁵⁷

Kautsky's view of how socialism would come out of capitalism was based on three preconceptions: the process would be gradual; it had to occur in a condition of plenty; and the state was not an appropriate agency for the socialization of production. Each of these preconceptions was revealed in Kautsky's writings on socialization, and he repeatedly insisted that the transition had to be orderly, because disorder would interrupt the process of production, thereby creating shortages, unemployment, and other hardships. His notion of the world of socialism was a world of plenty, not want; for this reason he rejected the idea that the transition from capitalism to socialism must necessarily include a period of lowered production. To ensure that socialization did not totally disrupt production, Kautsky argued, the owners of property taken over in the conversion had to be compensated. This was necessary because socialization would be gradual, and the capitalists who retained their property at the beginning had to be confident that they would not someday suddenly lose everything without compensation, otherwise they would simply stop producing immediately. Kautsky recognized that the capitalists could be forced to produce, but he argued that this not only would subvert democracy, it would also result in lower levels of production and inferior products. He felt that if the unexpropriated capitalists were certain of eventual compensation, they would continue to produce in an orderly fashion.⁵⁸

In addition to the requirements of order and increased productivity, Kautsky felt that the pace and specifics of socialization had to correspond to the level of technical development in each particular area of production. He argued that socialist production was to be based on the achievements of capitalist production, that socialism was in this sense a

direct outgrowth of highly developed capitalism. He defined six criteria for determining the appropriateness of socialization: corporations before individual holdings; large enterprises before small; cartels before those companies in free competition; concerns which produced only for the domestic market before those which produced for export; firms with regular markets before those without; and finally, companies with relatively simple production techniques and few products before those with complicated techniques and a large variety of products. He also insisted that in the conversion from capitalism to socialism, the technicians, experts, and intellectuals who provided the technical know-how of large-scale production had to be won over to the new order. Just as he did in the political aspects of the revolution, he sought as much order and as little violence as possible in its economic aspects.⁵⁹

Perhaps the most interesting of Kautsky's ideas on socialization were the close relationship between democratic political forms and socialism he saw as vital to the survival of the new society and the mechanisms of economic administration he postulated. On the first matter he argued that because "constant political movement, constant economic and political struggle is the essence of democracy," socialism, particularly during the period of transition from capitalism, had to be tied to democracy. His point was that only under democratic forms would it be possible to work out class conflicts exclusively on a political level, without any disruption to production. If the workers had political control of the state, they could use it to settle their disputes with the remaining bourgeois forces and to adjust differences within the proletariat itself. Maximum hours, minimum wages, worker-protection laws, and other matters of importance to the workers would be dealt with on a political level, without resort to strikes and other forms of economic disruption. In fact, he proposed that in a socialist republic, no strikes would be allowed. He felt that calm and order could be achieved and maintained not by the oppressive tactics of a police regime, but by the workers' domination of political power.⁶⁰

Nationalization in the form of state socialism or state capitalism was not what Kautsky meant by socialization. Though he postulated an important role for the state in the process of socialization—as a central clearing house, as the source of general economic plans, as the agent of compensation, and as the capital source for concentration in agriculture—he did not assign to the state a permanent role as administrator or even supervisor of socialized holdings. His notion was that economic control in the socialist society would be shared by collegia made up of equal numbers of representatives from the state, the

workers, and consumers. The workers' councils would be the means by which the proletariat influenced the process of production. In every industry not immediately socialized, entrepreneurs, workers, and consumers would share equally in management. He also foresaw the creation of peasant cooperatives to manage the large holdings created by the state's buying up of small holdings. Housing cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, and other forms of local organization would provide a high degree of decentralized, direct popular control of the economic aspects of everyday life. Far from being dominant in economics, the state would only be a facilitating factor in the conversion and an equal partner with workers and consumers in major industry.⁶¹

Kautsky's proposals for implementing these plans were far less imaginative than the plans themselves. The socialization commission had only advisory powers, and the leaders of the new German state were not about to act on the commission's modest recommendations until after the constituent assembly elections. When those returned a non-socialist majority, the plan became a dead letter. At the second congress of the workers' and soldiers' councils, April 1919, his plan for socialization was read by Luise, Kautsky himself being ill at the time. This plan reiterated many of his earlier arguments, but called on the councils to pressure the new government into dealing with socialization. To this end he urged the congress to press for reunification of the two socialist parties. United, the proletariat could exert greater influence for a more thorough purging of elements of the old order and for more vigorous pursuit of socialism. But the congress could not respond to his pleas because the two parties were at the time moving even further apart. Moreover, his opinion carried much less weight in the spring of 1919 than it had earlier; his advice no longer was a significant factor. Finally, Kautsky probably would not have supported the councils if they had gone beyond moral pressure and into the streets to give their demands more substance. He was not present at the congress, but he probably would have favored the resolution calling for the socialization issue to be turned over to the *Zentralrat*. The resolution was carried over cries from the leftists of "trash!" and "academic nonsense [*Kathedersozialisten*]." Once again his ideas were not translated into action.⁶²

Work in the foreign office commanded more of Kautsky's time and created more headaches for him than did his work with the socialization commission. Not the least of his problems was his own lack of experience in public affairs in general and with the protocol and processes of the foreign office in particular. He was acutely aware of his

own weaknesses in this regard. Another serious obstacle was the strong personal conflict between Kautsky and the foreign minister, Wilhelm Solf, a career diplomat-politician appointed in the waning days of the old Reich. Solf, like most imperial holdovers, was offended by the presence of a socialist in his department; he distrusted Kautsky's motives, training, and abilities. He even tried to get Kautsky out of the country by arguing that he was needed to establish contacts with French and British socialists in Bern. Since Kautsky's primary function as an outside advisor in the foreign office was to arrange for the publication of documents that would fix responsibility for the war on the old order, Solf's attitude was not surprising. Kautsky soon found that he could not do his job properly because Solf was limiting his access to critical documents. His threat to resign unless Solf left the foreign office added to the growing demand that the foreign minister be replaced. In early December 1918, Solf was implicated by innuendo in an abortive conservative coup attempt; a few days later Kautsky accused the news bureau of the foreign office of spying on the Spartacists, and on the same day Solf and Haase exchanged harsh words over Solf's accusation that the USPD had received financing for their revolutionary activities from the Russians. Finally, on 12 December the *Freiheit* announced Solf's impending departure; on the eighteenth his resignation was announced and the cabinet began looking for a successor; and on 21 December, Count Ulrich Brockdorff-Rantzau was named to the post.⁶³

Although Kautsky got along much better with Rantzau than he had with Solf, the work at the foreign office was complicated by a number of other factors. For instance, leftist critics charged Kautsky with incompetence and whitewashing when rumors circulated that important foreign-office documents had been burned. Kautsky denied that any such burnings took place while he was working on the project. Some critics argued that he should have published the documents as they came to light, rather than waiting until the entire collection was ready. Kautsky defended his methods on the grounds that defenders of the old Reich could not then claim that the documents were taken out of context. Bourgeois and conservative journals claimed that publishing the documents would make it harder to gain a fair peace. Kautsky argued that the documents would prove that the deposed kaiser and his clique had been responsible for the war, not the German people, and that this should ensure a better peace. Other right-wing critics, like the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, complained that sensitive state documents were in the hands of a foreigner because Kautsky was a Czech. The *Freiheit* defended Kautsky against the charge, arguing that he was not a

Czech, but a "Prague-German." This article closed by suggesting that Germany would gain a great deal "if a man like Karl Kautsky" were to replace Solf in the foreign office. Kautsky certainly never entertained such grandiose designs for public office, and fortunately conditions did not permit his being appointed to such a post.⁶⁴

Two literary works resulted from Kautsky's efforts in the foreign office. After a long delay, during which the government published a white paper on the war-guilt question, a four-volume publication entitled *The German Documents on the Outbreak of War, 1914* was issued. Kautsky had finished his work by late March, but for a variety of reasons—most of them associated with trying to get a better deal from the Allies—the collection was not published until October. At that time, Max Montgelas and Walter Schücking were identified as primary editors, and Kautsky as compiler. This collection has long since been superseded by more complete collections of documents, but when it was published, the left was shocked to discover how correct it had been in condemning Germany for the war, while the right argued that the documents proved that the kaiser and his clique had not caused the war. The intention of the government in sponsoring the project had been to forestall a harsh peace by blaming the war on the old Reich, not the German people. Obviously this end was not realized.⁶⁵

The second work to come out of Kautsky's foreign office experience was his analysis of the documents he had edited, *How the World War Began* (*Wie die Weltkrieg entstand*), which is usually given a much more descriptive title when translated into English, *The Guilt of Wilhelm Hohenzollern*. This, too, has been superseded by more recent studies, but at the time of its publication the topic was of immediate concern to many people, and Kautsky's book received wide notice. The study began with a brief review of imperialist conflicts and German diplomatic isolation and then turned to the events between the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the war declarations of early August. While Kautsky assigned first responsibility to Austrian incompetence and folly, he clearly presented Kaiser Wilhelm as committed to and eager for war at least as early as 4 July and probably by 30 June. The bulk of the book purported to show that the political, diplomatic, and military elites of imperial Germany conspired with the Austrian leadership to dupe both peoples into a senseless war. In Germany, Kautsky argued, the people were purposely lied to; they went into war enthusiastically because they did not understand the true motives of the kaiser. The point of this study, according to Kautsky's own introduction, was to demonstrate that German statesmen, not the German people, were responsible for the war.⁶⁶

Naturally Kautsky's arguments did not go unchallenged. From moderate conservatives like Hans Delbrück, prominent historian and editor of the influential *Preussische Jahrbücher*, to reactionary chauvinists like Theodor Schiemann, historian, friend of the ex-kaiser, and editor of the conservative *Kreuzzeitung*, critics took on Kautsky's preconceptions, his use of documents, and his interpretation of facts. Delbrück's criticism was the most measured and professional. He objected primarily to Kautsky's tendency to impute nefarious motives to the Germans and Austrians while taking the French and the English at their word. The more right-wing critics, like Schiemann, simply denounced Kautsky as a traitor and a liar. Other right-wingers, like Friedrich Freksa, a Munich literary figure, emphasized Kautsky's non-native status, repeatedly referring to him as a Czech. Eventually the furor over Kautsky's book died down, though, of course, the argument over war guilt still rages. But the response to his study did demonstrate that in the early years of the shaky Weimar Republic, Kautsky was still prominent enough to attract the attention of scholars and politicians.⁶⁷

Kautsky's historical work was not directly connected with his socialist activities, and his active participation in socialist affairs dropped off drastically during the spring of 1919 as the USPD moved further to the left. As this leftward movement accelerated, Kautsky came under increasing fire from the Bolsheviks and the German left for deserting the cause of revolution. But as these attacks increased, Kautsky became even more adamant in defense of his distinction between political and social revolution. In a July 1919 letter to his youngest son, Benedikt, he offered the clearest exposition of his fully developed view:

I completely agree with you on this, in that I hold the English way of socialization to be the most fruitful future course. Many now see this as capitulation to Bernstein. But whoever thinks so has forgotten (or never knew) what my opposition to Bernstein was.

[Bernstein] held that Marx's prognosis of economic development was false, that the proletariat would not grow, and therefore that socialism was only attainable with the aid of the socially sensitive part of the bourgeoisie. He saw this portion growing as the class struggle was channeled into milder forms, and above all considered revolution unnecessary or dangerous. I have actively fought that, and in this I was right in the end.

These people have never been able to distinguish between social and political revolution. This [latter] can only be a sudden act, and it was indispensable in eastern Europe. The military monarchy was not to be overthrown otherwise. But now that has

happened. The task is now above all only the social revolution—except in Asia and the colonies. This revolution is only feasible gradually [and] therefore often not externally recognizable as a revolution. It is impossible to say exactly when and where capitalism began, and so it is also impossible to say: now capitalism has ended, now socialism begins.

That the *social* revolution will only be a gradual process is a view which I have always taken, as for example in the Erfurt program. . . . I have not changed sides in this.⁶⁸

Such a view was perhaps implicit in the Erfurt program, but Kautsky did not make this explicit distinction until the pressure of two revolutions forced him to do so. By that time many people who had learned at least part of their Marxism from Kautsky were dedicated to forcing the pace of both political and social revolution. Other former party comrades had abandoned their dreams of social revolution altogether and were satisfied with, or even found too precipitate, a political revolution that left the workers in a minority. Kautsky's position was no longer popular, and he found himself without a party.

From mid-1919 to 1924, when he and Luise left Germany to return almost permanently to Vienna, Kautsky was little involved in party affairs. A long visit, full of complications, to the Menshevik-dominated government of independent Georgia kept him out of Germany from August 1920 to May 1921. This trip was originally intended as a fact-finding visit by a delegation of old Second Internationalists, but he fell ill during the trip, and was forced to stop in Rome. The Mensheviks who headed this short-lived government considered him a mentor, and he was treated to a long visit once he did arrive. He was in Georgia from late September until early in January. Kautsky enjoyed this experience, and wrote an account called *Georgia: A Social Democratic Republic*, which was little more than an attack on the Bolsheviks and a rather rose-colored look at the Georgian situation. Before Kautsky returned to Germany from Georgia, the Red Army had invaded and conquered it. Upon his return, Kautsky found the USPD a shambles, with most of the membership having gone over to the newly formed communist movement following the Halle congress of October 1920. The remainder of the party was still far from united, and it gradually disintegrated completely.⁶⁹

After the dissolution of the USPD, Kautsky drifted back toward the SPD without ever again playing a significant role in its affairs. He contributed very little to the official party press, fewer than a score articles in the *Vorwärts* after 1919. His contributions to the Austrian

and other foreign socialist presses increased after 1920, and he spent a good deal of time writing books and articles criticizing Bolshevik Russia. The great war destroyed the party that had been his since 1880; as a result, he lost the journal he had edited for nearly thirty-five years. The victory of the Bolsheviks in Russia and the incomplete revolution in Germany created a situation in which his reasoned and relatively cautious brand of Marxism no longer appealed to a working class hardened by war and revolution. In 1924 he returned to Vienna, retiring forever from active political life.
